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Understanding North Korea in the Korean Diaspora: Teaching North Korea to American Students

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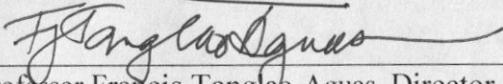
Understanding North Korea in the Korean Diaspora:
Teaching North Korea to American Students

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in Interdisciplinary Studies from
The College of William and Mary

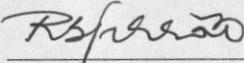
by

So Dam Hong

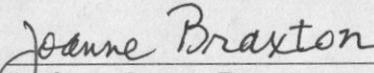
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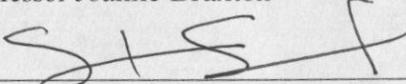
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Abstract

My honors thesis is a teaching project on the topic of “Understanding North Korea in the Korean Diaspora,” which is designed to be part of Korean American Diaspora Studies (KADS), a class taught in spring 2016 at the College of William and Mary, or as a short individual class for Korean American and non-Korean American college students. I designed and developed this course and honors thesis to provide teachers and students with the opportunity to teach and learn about North Korea beyond preconceptions and stereotypes, which are constructed and maintained by the mainstream culture, by digging out the buried and neglected narratives of the marginalized North Korean people in a diasporic context. I argue that this course, Understanding North Korea in the Korean Diaspora, challenges the hegemonic education system in America and dominant framework of teaching and learning by deconstructing the historical knowledge about North Korea. While learning to resist against and challenge the dominant system, students in this course practice agency and learn to mobilize their communities as leaders.

Introduction

Overview and Justification of the Project

Public education in South Korea provides elementary school students with mandatory unification classes that take up one or two hours per week of their curriculum. In the unification classes, nationalized homogeneous textbooks exclusively designed by the South Korean government are used to teach the students about North Korea, North Koreans, and the inter-Korean relations. Also, the students are taught to understand that North Korea and South Korea are of the same nation or *minjok* (민족) and look at the Korean reunification as a necessary step to achieve the unified nation of Koreans. Yet, these nationalized textbooks often receive criticism for merely reflecting the current administration's political agenda rather than presenting sufficient and accurate information about the inter-Korean relations and the Korean reunification. As such, the unification textbooks by the current Park Geun Hye administration simply stress the importance of the reunification and cultural exchanges between the two Koreas, following the administration's Reunification Jackpot (통일대박, *Tongil Daebak*) policy, without allowing the South Korean students to learn about the military attacks from North Korea over the last few years or the human rights situations in North Korea.

The unification education, although it may be biased and insufficient to some extent, has helped the South Korean students to be familiarized with North Korea and its people. Yet, it ends with elementary education in South Korea, leaving a great majority of South Koreans with the one-nation, one-*minjok* mentality but no further opportunity to advance their understanding of North Korea and the reunification. According to Unification White Paper, an annual report by the Ministry of Unification in South Korea, only 53% of South Korean youth expressed a positive view toward the Korean reunification (209). Moreover, it indicated that 200 elementary,

middle, and high schools in South Korea that participated in the above survey taught the unification education only for three to five hours on average per year (209). These results show that despite the deeply-rooted mentality of the one-*minjok* Korea, most South Koreans have nearly no knowledge about their Northern brethren. One of many problems caused by such ignorance and indifference toward North Korea in South Korea is a discord rather than harmony between South Koreans and North Korean defectors in South Korea. In addition to the lack of educational opportunities about North Korea, decades of political and military tension between the two Koreas also creates a hostile attitude toward North Koreans among South Koreans. Looking at the current relationships between South and North Koreans living together in South Korea, many scholars point out that with the current level of preparation, the Korean reunification is nearly impossible, and even if the two countries are united, the consequence will likely be disastrous (Heo; Kim & Oh).

Outside the Korean peninsula, the issue of North Korea and the Korean reunification gets even more complicated. North Korea is more than well known for its nuclear threats to the global community. Yet, other aspects of the country including the ordinary citizens are underrepresented and neglected not only in the global community but also within the Korean diaspora. The term *Korean migrants* usually refers to South Koreans living in a different country, and the Korean diaspora often indicates a community of South Koreans around the world. One of the reasons for such an exclusion of North Koreans in the global context is that North Koreans are not able to leave the country or freely move around unless they defect or are overseas workers assigned by the government. Also, although there is an increasing number of defectors from North Korea, the majority of these North Koreans prefer to hide their backgrounds, assimilate and become the citizens of the new countries instead of maintaining the North Korean

identity due to security, family, and various other reasons. In addition to these internal causes of the marginalization of North Koreans within the Korean diaspora, there are external causes that prevent them from being considered as a part of Korea and larger the globe. The South Korean government plans the reunification, backed by the Koreans' one-*minjok* mentality, without educating South Korean people what the unified future will bring. Also, the global community is too focused on the nuclear security issues to see the country beyond the nuclear bombs. For example, since the United Nations imposed a list of hardline trade sanctions on North Korea in March 2016, the media has been skeptical about the effects of these sanctions to disarm the North Korea's nuclear weapons. One of the concerns with this recent decision of the UN is that financial losses, if any, caused by these trade sanctions will negatively impact the ordinary citizens of North Korea without affecting the nuclear plants or elite classes. Moreover, although the price of any sanctions is to be paid by the people in North Korea, the voice of these people is nowhere to be heard.

Since the preconceptions about North Korea are set strongly as said above, the American education system hardly challenges those presumptions but makes compromises with the social discourse that is commonly understood among the students. In their study about American teachers teaching about Asia in US secondary schools, Hong and Halvorsen give an example of a teacher, John, inadvertently making compromises with students' preconceptions about Asia, here specifically about North Korea, and thus perpetuating the stereotypes about the country:

For example, even though John's personal goal was to break down stereotypes, he used the film *Team America* without deconstructing its biased and distorted images of North Korea. As a result, the entire nation, which has more than 20 million people, tended to be represented through its political leader. This limited representation would ultimately support a US hardline policy over North Korea, without considering how this stance impacts the vast number of civilians. (387)

This example shows how the education system in America teaches about Asia, particularly North Korea, with a limited perspective and contributes to forming insufficient and inaccurate images about North Korea among its students. In these educational settings, there is no further opportunity for these students to improve their understanding of North Korea beyond the Kim family and nuclear missiles. Such a limited representation becomes all they know about North Korea or even Korea as a whole. Thus, I find it very important for a course like the one in this project to be taught to American students so that they realize that there are more than 20 million people whose voice has been silenced.

Preview

This project is designed to be taught to Korean American and non-Korean American students. Whereas South Koreans have some opportunities to access the unification education promoted by the South Korean government, global citizens and Koreans outside the Korean peninsula have few chances to learn about North Korea, especially about the stories of its people. Although the four units selected in this course are not the only important topics to study when trying to understand North Korea, this research and teaching project focuses on the narratives, human rights and inter-Korean aspects of understanding North Korea within the Korean diaspora.

In this paper, first, I elaborate on the process, findings and outcomes of my ethnographic research conducted during the summer 2015. Second, I explain the pedagogical settings for this project as well as the participant-observation process of the KADS class, report findings and learnings from the course-building and teaching experience, and illustrate my own teaching strategies based on the pedagogies of earlier scholars as well as the findings from KADS. I also report the findings of a teaching demo session done with the students of KADS on the topic,

“Understanding North Korea in the Korean Diaspora: North Korean Defectors in South Korea, the Inter-Korean Relations, and the Korean Reunification.” Third, I list out the four units of this course under the course schedule: “The Modern History of the Korean Peninsula”; “North Korean Human Rights and the Stories of North Korean Defectors”; “Refugee or Migrant?: Resettlement of North Korean Defectors in South Korea”; and “The Future of Two Koreas: Is Reunification a Jackpot?”. Explanation of each unit includes a short description of the unit, a list of reading assignments and visual materials, which are to be read by students or be utilized by teachers, the learning objectives of the unit, a justification of the listed learning materials, and teaching strategies that can be followed by the teachers. Lastly, this paper concludes with the outcomes of the synthesis of the summer research, of the KADS observation and of the teaching demo session, limitations of this project, and possible future discussions.

Summer Research

In Korean academia, North Koreans in South Korea are perceived as political defectors, as refugee migrants, or as a cultural minority (Chung, 3). Political science emphasizes the political significance of North Korean defectors and suggests “the ways in which they should be received, trained, and utilized as personnel for post-unification” (3). In refugee migrant studies, scholars focus on studying the traumatic experiences of North Korean refugees and claim that such experiences cause the initial maladjustment of North Koreans in South Korea (4). Cultural minority studies look at North Koreans’ two-way process of citizen-becoming, from learning societal norms and laws to practicing individual strategies in response to these rules (4). Thus, depending on the perspective taken by the government and public, policies and public sentiment toward North Korean defectors can vary drastically. For example, during the Cold War and Korean military regime periods, the political significance of North Korean defectors was emphasized, and they were viewed as political heroes (8). On the other hand, in recent years, refugee migrant and cultural minority perspectives have taken the lead in policy-making processes, focusing on cultural assimilation and financial assistance during the resettlement of North Koreans. Due to the particular meaning and implications that each term (political defector, refugee, and minority) carries, from here on, the term *defector* will be used instead of *refugee* in order to be academically neutral about their status in South Korea.

This ethnographic research, the first part of this project, was done over the summer of 2015. The research included working at a North Korean human rights non-profit organization and conducting in-person interviews with North Korean defectors residing in the Seoul and Daegu areas.

Internship at People for Successful Corean Reunification (PSCORE)

My internship at PSCORE started on June 1st 2015 and ended on August 1st 2015. I worked Monday through Thursday from 9:30am to 6:00pm. I worked mostly in an office except for a few times when I participated in outdoor campaigns. Some of my responsibilities included interviewing North Korean defectors for the organization's summer research report, transcribing and translating the interview audio files, translating other interview scripts for a book about daily lives in North Korea, creating marketing materials, and participating in outdoor campaigns. The organization had 10-15 interns from South Korea, the United States, France, and Germany over the summer.

The aims of this internship as a part of my research were (1) to gain non-profit experience in a North Korean human rights organization in South Korea, (2) to obtain information and knowledge through working at an organization where a concentrated population of North Korean defectors is present, and (3) to have opportunities for direct communication with North Korean defectors in the Seoul area. In the following paragraphs, I explain how I met these aims through my internship, elaborating the details of my responsibilities and my observation of the work environment. In addition, I provide objective analysis of my participant-observation during the internship.

Working at PSCORE, a North Korean human rights non-profit, non-governmental organization, I realized challenges encountered by non-profit organizations and social workers in South Korea, especially those that are North Korea-related. The South Korean public is generally indifferent and skeptical about non-profit works and North Korean human rights issues. When PSCORE interns held outdoor campaigns in universities and train stations with posters, there were more foreigners than South Koreans who expressed interest in PSCORE's works. At

universities in particular, many South Korean students seemed to avoid eye-contacts with the interns, being completely indifferent to the campaign. The same was seen in the demographics of the interns at PSCORE; there were three South Korean interns out of 15 with the rest from other countries such as the United States, France, and Germany. Even among these three South Korean interns, two including myself studied and lived in the United States. Due to lack of interest from the South Korean public, PSCORE always struggles with funding, so the organization started to reach out to the outside of South Korea because they found the international community to be more generous when it came to North Korean human rights. Such apathy and skepticism toward North Korean human rights work is resulted from rooted hostility toward the North Korean political regime in South Korean society that is even more strengthened by recent missile tests done by the North Korean government. Also, the underrepresented voice of North Korean defector populations that does not readily reach the South Korean public is another reason.

Because of the difficulties as the apathetic public sentiment and short funding, PSCORE had only two paid workers, the founder and secretary general, and the rest of employees were temporary unpaid interns. Therefore, as there are relatively more interns working during the summer than the academic year, there are more tasks and works requested to be done in summer. Consequently, summer interns were often overwhelmed by the workload, having to juggle with multiple tasks at once and being crunched by deadlines. In *Trauma Stewardship*, Laura Lipsky explains how those with occupations that require them to take care of others, such as doctors and social workers, can easily be burnt out or even traumatized and display trauma exposure responses due to lack of proper self-care. Particularly, because financial circumstances of non-profit usually do not allow them to hire many employees, many social workers struggle with intense stress, depression or trauma from listening to their clients' stories while having to

complete multiple tasks in a limited timeframe. I found that Lipsky's claim about trauma exposure responses in social workers was demonstrated among the temporary interns in PSCORE as well. Many interns expressed their experiences of chronic exhaustion and fatigue followed by frequent minor health problems, which are some of the trauma exposure responses listed by Lipsky.

In addition to gaining non-profit experiences in South Korea by interning at PSCORE, I was able to have access to information sources working at the organization, such as daily interactions with North Korean defectors from diverse backgrounds and age groups. I helped a female student to write college applications in South Korea. Some North Korean defectors decide to continue their education in South Korea because South Korean universities have a special admission policy for North Koreans, which makes it relatively easier for the North Korean students to enter prestigious schools in South Korea. The South Korean government also funds the entire tuition as long as the students maintain an average grade point of C. Conversations with the female student I assisted contributed to findings about the resettlement process of North Korean youth and young adults. While she mainly interacted with fellow North Korean defector women of her age group in South Korea, she was determined to assimilate into the South Korean society in order to pass as a South Korean. For example, she expressed her frustration with difficulties pronouncing certain vowels in South Korean language and also experienced embarrassment when her North Korean accent made others to ask her if she were a North Korean. Just like this student, I found that many North Korean youth try to assimilate into South Korean society more actively than older North Korean adults through acculturation by obtaining language skills and keeping up with fashion or pop culture trends. Also, the desire of some North Korean defector youth to continue their education in South Korea demonstrates their

determination to adjust to the new environment and become socially and economically independent from the assistance of the government.

Another responsibility I had as an intern was working on PSCORE's summer research report project which was about labor rights in North Korea. The project required several face-to-face interviews with North Korean defectors who had experience working abroad through sponsorship by the North Korean government. Conducting interviews provided me with opportunities to speak in person with North Korean defectors, mostly men who had worked in industries including but not limited to construction and forestry.

In order to earn foreign currency, the North Korean government signs contracts with local businesses in countries such as Russia, China, and Kuwait to send out a number of workers each year. The government directly works with a local company to gain visa invitations into the country for a set number of workers depending on the size of the worksite or project. Some workers participate in construction or forestry while some open North Korean restaurants. Some testimonies of former North Korean overseas workers report that they were deprived of rights to maintain human dignity, freely move, be properly compensated for labor, or live in a healthy and safe environment.

Among the approximately ten North Korean defectors whom I interviewed for this report, the disparity of income and living standards was very evident. A woman whose family was involved in the North Korean Labor Party shared her experience working in an international trade business as an executive member. She reported that she was regularly paid and experienced little discrimination due to her gender or class status. In South Korea, she works as a counselor for North Korean defectors in a hospital thanks to her higher education degree attained in North Korea and her professional work experience. In contrast, many other female North Korean

defectors struggle to make a living with monthly resettlement money and social welfare provided by the South Korean government. According to Sung Chul Cho, one of the challenges faced by North Korean defectors is the problem of fairness (69). He reports that North Koreans from lower classes in North Korea are disadvantaged in South Korea when it comes to employment (69). Those from elite classes often received higher education in North Korea and have valuable information about the North Korean government, thus they are frequently invited to lecture or speech events and have an easier time getting jobs in South Korea. Likewise, among the overseas workers whom I interviewed, those who had been in supervisor positions worked as counselors or in the government, holding relatively well-paying jobs compared to those who had been working-class laborers. Class differences in North Korea result in a disparity of privilege among North Korean defectors in South Korea.

The internship at PSCORE helped me successfully fulfill the aims I initially planned for this research by providing various information sources, both primary and secondary, and hands-on experiences working at a North Korean human rights non-profit organization in South Korea. However, one unexpected finding during my observation of the work environment and other interns was the experience of trauma exposure responses displayed by the interns at PSCORE including myself. Also, the conversations and interviews I had with North Korean defectors during the internship period led me to personally conduct a few more interviews with other defectors because I was interested in their experiences of resettlement in South Korea.

Interviews with North Korean Defectors

The other half of my summer research consisted of interviews with eight North Korean defectors whom I contacted through personal relationships and Internet recruitment. The interviews were usually conducted on weekends over a meal or coffee and lasted for about one

hour. Here, however, I do not plan to detail their personal information or elaborate on the contents of the interviews because the IRB approval to use human subjects in this project was too delayed to be included before conducting them. Since I am not able to cite quotes from the interviews, this portion of the research mainly includes my impressions and experiences having conversations with North Korean defectors.

One interesting response from the North Korean defector interviewees was that most of them expressed a great interest in and made positive comments about my status as an international student studying in the United States. Even with the clarification made before the interviews about my nationality and citizenship as a South Korean, many of them expressed appreciation and gratitude for my attention to North Korean issues. It is important to note such responses from these North Korean defectors to my status – almost as an American – because these positive reactions toward America, even if they might be superficial, arguably demonstrate the transition process of North Korean defectors from the anti-America system of North Korea to the pro-America system of South Korea. Moreover, the neutralization of my status from a South Korean to an American seemed to help the interviewees to participate more candidly.

The initial purpose of these interviews was to find out if North Korean defectors experienced difficulties when resettling in South Korea, specifically mental health difficulties. Also, I aimed to find out what resources and assistance were available to them, under the assumption that the resettlement assistance provided by the South Korean government would be limited. Studies show that many North Korean defectors who experienced starvation, abuse, or human trafficking in North Korea and on the way to South Korea suffer from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) (International Crisis Group, 11). Thus, many of my interview questions focused on their experiences with mental health difficulties and whether they have sought help

and treatment. To my surprise, in contrast to my expectation that North Korean defectors would explicitly express psychological distress due to past traumatic experiences, most of them considered mental health too insignificant to talk about. They considered seeking relevant medical treatments unnecessary or less important than other issues that are more directly connected to making a living, such as financial hardship.

Such an indifferent response to mental health issues is not only because they are unaware of their mental health conditions but also because they have never had a proper chance to receive counseling or medical services regarding mental health. The tendency among the North Korean defector population to neglect mental health issues and avoid seeking help is an outcome of the cultural atmosphere in South Korea, which discourages people from acknowledging mental disorders or seeking necessary treatment (International Crisis Group, 11). Such a culture in South Korea leaves North Koreans with no knowledge about mental health and available medical services.

In addition to lack of knowledge about mental health, a limited availability of mental health care resources for North Korean defectors in South Korea is an obstacle when they do seek help. It is difficult for many North Korean defectors to afford expensive psychological or psychiatric services. Also, the number of free counselors, who work in governmental institutions like Hana Centers (a governmental institution that assists North Korean defectors with resettlement after they complete the Hanawon cultural orientation), is very limited, especially in the areas outside Seoul. One counselor whom I met, who worked at the Hana Center in Daegu, said that he sometimes felt guilty for not being available for everyone all the time because he alone was responsible for the many North Korean defectors residing in the Daegu and Kyungsangbuk-do areas. Moreover, some North Korean women, who are the majority of North

Korean defectors as well as of PTSD patients among them, felt uncomfortable talking about private matters to a male counselor, which shows another limitation of mental health services for North Korean defectors in South Korea.

North Korean defectors suffer from mental health problems resulting not only from their past traumatic experiences but also from challenges directly related to resettlement. My interviewees reported that one of the biggest challenges faced by North Korean defectors is financial hardship due to difficulties finding well-paying jobs in South Korean society, where they have to constantly adjust themselves to assimilate and where there is intense discrimination in general against North Koreans. The degree of resettlement is often measured by the level of assimilation of North Korean defectors into South Korean mainstream culture and society. The standard of assimilation is initially set in the orientations offered by Hanawon (a governmental institution that provides cultural orientations and vocational education for North Korean defectors upon their arrival in South Korea). These Hanawon orientations aim to help North Korean defectors to achieve successful resettlement in South Korea by teaching them about cultural and societal norms, South Korean language, etc.

Yet, scholars criticize the Hanawon programs for reproducing traditional patriarchal norms that emphasize gender stereotypes and for sending an implicit message that everyone in South Korea lives up to the standard of the middle class lifestyle (Chung, 17). It becomes problematic when North Korean defectors realize that their financial situations, often funded only by resettlement money and social welfare, do not allow them middle class lifestyles. Frustration derived from such disappointment and financial hardships worsens the mental health conditions of many North Korean defectors.

In addition, discrimination against North Koreans in South Korean society forces some North Korean defectors to hide their identities as North Koreans (although some do voluntarily choose to give up their identities as North Koreans for various reasons such as personal resentment against North Korea). Loss of identity resulting from fear of discrimination and hatred adds to the list of challenges encountered by North Koreans in South Korea. Likewise, although North Korean defectors seem to consider the financial hardship as well as the struggles of assimilation and discrimination irrelevant to mental health, experiencing these difficulties does negatively affect the mental health conditions of many North Korean defectors in South Korea.

Though it was evident that some difficulties faced by North Korean defectors were due to limitations of governmental services and discrimination from the South Korean public and my interviewees expressed frustration with some aspects of their resettlement experiences, I noticed that they tended to avoid making negative comments about the South Korean government or people. Many of them, mostly women (men in general were more comfortable stating their political views about the South Korean government that were negative), ended the interviews by saying, "I am happy to be here. I am grateful that South Korea gave me freedom." Such responses demonstrate that they feel pressured to some extent to show appreciation for the country that has admitted and given them citizenship. Thus, they felt that it was their responsibility to fit in and assimilate into South Korean society at the end of the day despite whatever challenges they faced.

Outcome

One of the findings of the summer research was that it is not sufficient or appropriate to provide North Korean defectors with one-dimensional mental health services which are not only

limited in terms of availability of knowledge and treatment but also ignorant of other factors that affect mental health conditions such as financial hardship and fear of discrimination. It is evident that mental health problems alone, in its one-dimensional sense, cannot represent the whole of resettlement related difficulties faced by North Korean defectors in South Korea. Challenges that North Korean defectors encounter resettling in South Korea are intertwined and multi-layered. For instance, discrimination and prejudice against North Koreans in South Korean society influence the employment of North Korean defectors, and without a means of living, they are unable to afford medical services or education that may be necessary to live in South Korea. In addition, such discrimination from South Koreans often impacts the psychology of North Korean defectors, which makes many of them unable to overcome mental health problems that they already had and suffer from additional illnesses.

Some of the responses that I received from the interviewees allowed me to realize other important issues such as the Korean reunification and inter-Korean relations that are closely knitted with the resettlement of North Korean defectors. The Korean reunification is a significant part of the lives of North Korean defectors. Knowing what the Korean reunification means for both Koreas and the Korean identity, many North Korean defectors I met stressed the significance of their bicultural experiences having lived in both North and South Korea, suggesting the possibility of utilizing their experience for social consolidation when the two Koreas are united. Also, for many North Korean defectors, the reunification is the only way to see family members and visit their hometowns again, and thus not surprisingly, most of them expressed high hope for the Korean reunification in the near future.

The findings of my summer research from the internship at PSCORE and interviews led me to discover the need to look at the issue of North Korean defectors from a broader

perspective. It is not only insufficient but also inappropriate to try to solve the problems experienced by North Korean defectors in South Korea by merely giving them more resettlement money and expecting them to assimilate into South Korean society. I did not find an ultimate solution to the North Korean resettlement challenges from this research. Yet, this research allowed me to expand the focus of this study to factors that are important to the lives of both North and South Koreans such as the inter-Korean relations and Korean reunification because all of these matters are not independent from each other but are so intertwined that they cannot be addressed without studying all of them together. Also, recognizing my own ignorance and lack of knowledge about North Korea and its people despite my ethnic and cultural background as a Korean, I also discovered my want and need to share these findings and knowledge with others in the Korean and American diaspora. Even for a South Korean like myself who completed earlier education in South Korea where relatively more information about North Korea is available, a big portion of my background knowledge about North Korea and the inter-Korean relations was challenged while conducting this research. Thus, I believe that for Koreans outside the peninsula as well as non-Koreans, it is difficult to develop an in-depth understanding of these issues. After completing the summer research, I not only made a few changes to the initial plan of this honors thesis project by expanding the focus to understanding North Korea in the Korean diaspora but also I selected the four most relevant topics to be included in a course schedule that is designed to be taught to Korean American and non-Korean American college students.

Pedagogical Structure

Second part of this honors thesis project includes the research and development of pedagogical strategies as well as the course-building and observation of Korean American Diaspora Studies (KADS) taught in spring 2016 at the College of William and Mary. I first researched scholars and teachers who cultivated teaching strategies of cultural studies and critical pedagogies. Then, based on the findings from the literature as well as the findings from the summer research, I developed the pedagogical structure for this course so that the students are critically investigating the materials rather than merely absorbing the information given. Moreover, it is designed to make sure that the students learn about North Korea beyond the nuclear security issues and understand the complexity of the inter-Korean relations and Korean reunification. Also, after conducting an 8-week participant-observation of the KADS class which represents a sample college class in the US, I supplemented the pedagogical structure based on the findings from the observation.

Development of Pedagogical Structure

My first question while developing this course was, “why is learning about North Korea and especially about narratives of its people important to American students?” To answer the question, I felt that it was important to build a connection between American students and North Korea and let the students find the significance of learning about the buried narratives of North Korean people around the world. Thus, I started by looking at this course as a form of cultural studies which will help improve cultural competency of students.

This course, however, will not only help students develop a better cultural competency by teaching them about people whose presence is underrepresented but also allow the students to (1) challenge the hegemony of the American education system, (2) deconstruct their historical

knowledge that has been constructed by the hegemonic system, (3) discover the buried past and reality of the marginalized, (4) give voice to their own hidden narratives, and (5) form a new sense of identity as a member of the Korean diaspora or the global community. That is done through recognizing the interconnectedness among the issues as North Korean defector resettlement, inter-Korean relations, and Korean reunification and understanding how neglected the stories of people are in the unification politics, as my research suggested. This pedagogical structure in this project will guide the students to develop connections among the four unit themes (see Course Schedule for unit titles) and see North Korea from a broader viewpoint beyond dictatorship and nuclear weapons. In the following paragraphs, I explain pedagogical backgrounds behind this structure and through what means the goals of this course can be achieved for students.

In *Border Crossings: Cultural Workers and the Politics of Education*, Henry Giroux argues, “cultural studies offers critical educators the opportunity for going beyond cultural analyses that romanticize everyday life or engage culture as merely the reflex of the logic of domination” (141). Traditional cultural analyses that bury a certain part of history by romanticizing all aspects of culture and everyday life have long constructed the education system in this country and thus influenced knowledge taught to and learned by students. By questioning the relations between margins and the center of power and giving voice to the marginalized, cultural studies gives educators and students the opportunity to challenge and deconstruct the hegemonic knowledge. It also works to discover the buried past and reality of the silenced who are at the margins of society. This course on North Korea, likewise, aims to deconstruct the historical knowledge about North Korea, which focuses only on the country’s political regime and political leader, by teaching the narratives of North Korean people which have been

romanticized and neglected by hegemonic powers whether they be the North Korean government or the global community. In addition, for students in the United States, this course offers the opportunity to challenge the relationship between themselves and the hegemonic education system by presenting the hidden and untaught stories of North Korean people.

By discovering the buried past and present of the marginalized North Korean people, students not only give voice to the silenced North Koreans but also give themselves the power to vocalize their imaginative narratives that are saturated with their own experiences. Giroux suggests that educators give the students the opportunity to learn how the dominant culture creates “borders saturated in terror, inequality, and forced exclusions” (150). He also suggests that the students rewrite the history of difference through “the process of crossing over into cultural borders that offer narratives,...[and] experiences” because it allows them to rethink “the relationship between the center and margins of power as well as between themselves and others” (151). The rewriting of narratives is often implemented by teachers of cultural and ethnic studies like Scott Kurashige. Kurashige introduces a writing assignment involving both historical analysis and imagination that he uses in his Asian American History course at the University of Michigan (1183). Students in Kurashige’s class reconstruct the life of a Chinese immigrant by rewriting imaginative narratives such as “why the subjects left their homeland, why they were drawn to America, and how detainment reshaped their attitudes and goals” (1183). Such exercises that offer students the opportunity to reconstruct the narratives of real or imaginative subjects give voice to not only those subjects but also the students themselves as the students’ experiences are mixed in the imagined narratives created by them.

One of the pedagogical strategies included in this course on North Korea is also a writing exercise that allows students to rewrite the narratives of North Korean defectors. Students read a

short interview article of a North Korean defector and write the life of the defector as they imagine (See Appendix I for writing prompts). The findings from my summer research with North Korean defectors indicate that the lives of North Korean defectors in South Korea are not one-dimensional and cannot be defined simply as a struggle or a success. In order for the students to use both factual analysis and imagination, and understand the multi-dimensional lives of North Korean defectors, the interview articles should not reveal too many details about the past or the present of North Korean defectors. From this writing exercise, while imagining the missing stories of North Korean people, students can rethink the relationship between themselves and North Korean defectors and challenge the border drawn by the dominant culture, which separated ‘us’ (students) from ‘them’ (North Koreans).

Ultimately, this course on North Korea allows students to form a new sense of identity as a member in the Korean diaspora or as a global citizen through exploring the narratives of North Koreans and remapping differences between students themselves and North Korean people. Giroux considers such an “intersection of new forms of culture and identity” as a form of resistance against the hegemony (151). This course will guide students to find their agency in deconstruction of hegemonic knowledge and apply that sense of agency to North Korean people by learning about how North Korean defectors display autonomy and understanding how agency can be practiced under oppression.

This course will give students the opportunity to not only obtain information about North Korea and its people beyond what is usually taught in the American education system but also understand how learning about them helps them challenge the hegemonic power of knowledge and reclaim identity and agency. The pedagogical structure of this course that focuses on discovering hidden narratives of the marginalized people will help students to dig out the stories

of North Koreans and defectors and thus realize the significance of speaking out. Furthermore, the discovery of the narratives aids the critical engagement and understanding of students even on topics that have remained largely political, such as the inter-Korean relations, by presenting the other side of story that is often neglected.

Observation of Korean American Diaspora Studies

The course-building of Korean American Diaspora Studies started in fall 2015 by selecting relevant unit themes, researching and collecting teaching materials and creating a syllabus. It is the first time for a course like KADS to be taught at the College of William and Mary, and the reason why I decided to participate in this course as a teaching apprentice was because I felt the same need for KADS as the one I felt for the course on North Korea in this project. There have been courses such as Asian American Studies and Asian American History taught at William and Mary in an effort to offer students an opportunity to discover parts of the American history that have been hidden and buried. I find KADS to have a significant meaning in terms of pushing the movement to challenge the traditional historical knowledge and education system constructed by the dominant culture and hegemonic power. KADS aims to guide students to explore and reconstruct their identities as a Korean American or an American in a new sphere called the Korean diaspora. The course does so by presenting cultural and historical accounts, from the modern Korean history to intergenerational relations in Korean American families and to Korean American sexuality, which are hardly found in the American education system but are influential and important parts of lives of many Korean Americans. Not only Korean American students but also non-Korean American students benefit from KADS by realizing the buried histories and stories of fellow Americans as they learn about what was never taught throughout their education in the United States. Just as Giroux's claims about cultural

studies, KADS, as it can be considered as a form of cultural studies, serves its educational and political roles of challenging historical knowledge constructed by the hegemonic power and giving voice to Koreans and Korean Americans by teaching how Koreans in diaspora have influenced the world around us.

My observation of KADS students began in January 2016 and lasted for 8 weeks until March 2016. The KADS class is comprised of 18 students, including 8 Korean American students (those who hold permanent residency or citizenship), 1 Korean-Chinese American student, 1 Korean international student, 3 Asian American students (those who are not of Korean heritage), and 5 non-Asian American students.

Among the Korean students, both American and international, there is a variation in terms of Korean language proficiency, length of residency in Korea and the United States, and familiarity with Korean traditional and contemporary cultures. Also, among the Korean American students, who are categorized simply based on their legal status in the United States, the length of residency in Korea seems to play a role in determining the student's language ability and familiarity with, or confidence with, Korean cultures. Non-Korean American students also have different levels of familiarity or previous background knowledge with Korean cultures. One student has experience living in South Korea and studying Korean language for a year, and there is another student with previous Korean language learning experience in the United States.

Most of the students in KADS completed their secondary education in the United States with exceptions of a couple who completed middle or high school in South Korea. In discussions about the Korean history, race relations/racism in Korea, and K-pop, there was more active participation from those who completed some education in South Korea than those who completed all or most of their education in America. On the other hand, the latter group,

comprised of mostly Korean American students, was more engaged in discussions about the intergenerational family relations, Asian American identity, and so forth. Non-Korean American students were more engaged in the unit topics that were relatively more familiar to them such as the race relations in the US and K-pop than the ones that are not taught in American schools or discussed in daily life. As they guided themselves along the exploration of the Korean American diaspora and concepts like *Jeong* (정) and *Hyo* (효) over the eight weeks, they demonstrated the development of connections with the Korean diaspora and the realization that they were learning about something that is not taught in the American education system.

Presentation of Teaching Demo Session (April 15, 2016)

This presentation is a teaching demo session of this course on North Korea with the students in KADS. The students learn about North Korean defectors in South Korea, the inter-Korean relations, and the Korean reunification as a way to understand North Korea within the Korean and Korean American diaspora. They study these topics through exploring the narratives of North Korean defectors in South Korea and discovering the hidden stories of people in the conversations of the inter-Korean relations and the Korean reunification (See Appendix I for a detailed class schedule as well as reading and visual materials assigned to the students and used in class).

Teaching a unit on North Korean defectors, the inter-Korean relations and the Korean reunification in KADS aimed to find out how students in the American education system would receive what is taught in my course on North Korea that challenges the dominant framework of education and preconceptions about North Korea. One factor which could possibly make a difference between the students in KADS and other college students in America was that they had already received training for nine weeks on studying what is usually not taught. By

participating in the KADS classes which discovered and explored the narratives of Koreans in the Korean American diaspora, students learned to unbury the stories that were not told in their earlier education in America. Thus, I expected that with their understanding of the Korean American diaspora, they would relatively easily see the significance of recognizing the narratives of North Korean defectors and how these stories are significant to but neglected in the politics of the inter-Korean relations and the Korean reunification. I also expected that they would realize the needs for this kind of course on North Korea to be taught in America, understanding how KADS influenced their knowledge about and perception of the world.

After my presentation, students filled out a survey that asked about their experiences travelling through this unit and opinions about the plausibility of such a class to be taught in America (See Appendix II for survey questions). There were 19 respondents in total. Three of the respondents remained anonymous. Among the 16 respondents who revealed their identities, ten of them were Koreans or Korean Americans, and the rest were non-Korean Americans, including both Asian American and non-Asian American students.

While Korean students found the significance of this unit mainly through their Korean heritage, non-Korean students found this unit important because of its relevancy to human rights, immigration issues, and global politics. They also pointed to personal relationship and connection with the Korean diaspora as a reason for the importance of the unit. Although all of the respondents thought that this unit was important to them, they seemed to have difficulties drawing a connection between this unit on North Korea and American students in general. The majority of students in KADS, Korean and non-Korean alike, said that the biggest obstacle for such a unit to be taught in American schools would be a problem of relevancy although most of

them believed that it was possible to be taught as part of world history or global/international studies.

These responses, which look at North Korea and the Korean reunification as irrelevant topics to American history, demonstrate the impacts and influences that the binary framework which dominates the American education system has on students. Hong and Halvorsen write:

School curricula in the US tend to divide the world between ‘them’ and ‘us’, ‘East’ and ‘West’, ‘North’ and ‘South’, or the ‘developed’ and the ‘under-developed’ (Willinsky 1998, Hurren 2000, Merryfield 2001, Kanu 2006). In this binary distinction, ‘we’ is defined as civilized, natural, rational, and intelligent, while ‘they’ tends to be depicted as uncivilized, strange, exotic, ignorant, and even dangerous (Said 1978, Hall 1997, Willinsky 1998, Merryfield 2001). School curricula influenced by this dominant framework of interpretation have contributed to essentializing and naturalizing the framework. (372)

Thus, it is difficult for students who have been influenced by this dominant framework of interpretation for their whole education to deconstruct that binary way of thinking and build a connection between ‘us’ and ‘them.’ Because North Korea or even Korea as a whole falls into this ‘them’ category in America, the students in KADS also could not help but draw a line between themselves and this course on North Korea, seeing it as irrelevant to ‘American’ history but relevant to ‘world’ history. I do not, however, mean that Korean history should be taught as a part of American history, but what I argue is that there are limitations with this binary framework of teaching the world and studying North Korea from that lens is insufficient.

One Korean international student in KADS wrote in his survey that the inter-Korean relations is relevant to American history although not many realize it because of the continuous interference of the United States with the issues in the Korean peninsula. His response is significant to note because it fills in the absent space between American history and Korean history by drawing upon global politics and foreign intervention. In that sense, with Unit 1 which addresses foreign powers that had influences and impacts on Korean history, students in this

course on North Korea will understand how American and Korean histories have been intertwined. Learning about the interconnected relations between the United States and Korea will also help students to see the limitations of the binary framework and learn how important it is to challenge and deconstruct that way of thinking.

Another obstacle suggested by a student in KADS was the current US foreign policies toward North Korea. In the American education system, North Korea is often summed simply as its political leader, just as in the example of the teacher, John, who selected *Team America* to teach about North Korea despite his intention to break down stereotypes about Asia. In order for a unit or course on North Korea and the narratives of its people to be taught in America, many preconceptions about the country, which have been constructed and reinforced by the mainstream culture, have to be greatly challenged and deconstructed.

This presentation in KADS helped me show that there is a demand from American students for opportunities to learn about what is not usually taught in the American education system. In addition, students found this unit important and relevant in their lives and believed that such a learning opportunity should be available in America, which demonstrates how being part of the KADS community and challenging the preconceptions about North Korea influenced the way the students view the world and their education system. Although it may be difficult for this course on North Korea to be included in schools in America under the current political and social circumstances, teaching this course will allow students to challenge the traditional knowledge not only about North Korea but also about the Korean diaspora and further deconstruct the binary framework of teaching and learning. The following course schedule will address the four units of this course that will guide students to explore the narratives of the

marginalized North Korean people, from the history of the division to the future of the unification.

Course Schedule

Unit 1

The Modern History of the Korean Peninsula

What did Korea before the division look like? How did the division of North and South Korea happen? An insight into the Korean peninsula in early- and mid-1900s, the Korean War, and South-North Korea political relationship in late-1900s and present.

1. Lynn, Hyung Gu. "Chronology." *Bipolar Orders: The Two Koreas since 1989*. New York, NY: Zed Books: 2007. xii-xiv.
2. Buzo, Adrian. "Introduction." *The Making of Modern Korea*. New York: Routledge: 2007. 1-12.
3. Kim, Enoch. "U.S.-North Korea Relations: The Work of Korean Americans." *Koreans in America: History, Identity, and Community*. Ed. Grace J. Yoo. Cognella: 2013. 385-390.

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the historical background of the Korean division and how the inter-Korean relations has changed, evolved, and/or degraded since the division.

Justification of Learning Materials:

Lynn's "Chronology" lists out historically significant events in the modern history of Korea, focusing on those events related to the division and progress of the inter-Korean relations. This reading will provide students with the most basic information about the Korean peninsula at the time of and after the division. In addition, Lynn does not fail to mention foreign influences or forces from the United States and Russia that took a part during the Korean division.

After gaining a brief experience with the modern Korean history, students will read the introduction of *The Making of Modern Korea* which elaborates on the development of the Korean identity. This short reading touches on geographical, political, and cultural accounts that played a role in the creation and evolution of one-nation (*minjok*) Korea. It specifically expands on explaining how Neo-Confucianism during the Chosun dynasty helped construct social and political orders that still influence the daily lives of Koreans in the present. Also, according to Buzo, although Koreans of both North and South had been influenced by foreign powers, the United States and the Soviet Union under Starlin, they transformed the imported values and ideologies into those that are unique to Korea. For example, South Korea's sociopolitical orders have been influenced by the ideology of democracy, but there still remain strong scents of the traditional Neo-Confucianism norms such as "hierarchy, status, personal loyalty, rigorous social etiquette, and social stratification in terms of gender, age, education and family prestige (Buzo, 1)." Likewise, from this reading, students learn not only about merely what happened in the Korean peninsula but also about how these events came about and what they mean to Korean people by exploring historical backgrounds and their influences on the Korean identity.

Exploring the Korean identity through history, students will also connect themselves with the Korean diaspora by reading Kim's article. Kim's article not only lists and briefly explains the events that revolved around the Korean division in chronological order but also creates a connection between North Korea and the Korean American diaspora by presenting examples of Korean Americans' movements for North Korean human rights. This reading will help Korean American as well as American students to better develop a connection with North Korea and its people by telling them how influential their involvement can be to help those suffering in the hidden corner of the Korean diaspora. In addition, students are again reminded of the

significance of the Korean identity that moved Korean Americans to be actively involved in the matters of North Korea and the Korean diaspora.

Teaching Strategies:

The teacher will have a lecture in order to supplement the reading assignments and explain some details of historical events in the Korean peninsula since the Japan-Korea Treaty of 1910 when Korea was colonized by Japan. The lecture will also talk about how foreign hegemonic powers played a role in the Korean division during the Cold War. It is important to note about the development of the inter-Korean relations in chronological order from the perspective of history, addressing the Sunshine Policy of the Kim Dae Jung administration in the late 1990s and early 2000s, to the hardline policies against North Korea during the Lee Myung Bak administration, and to the Trust-Building Process of the Park Geun Hye administration. The teacher should include the outcomes of the previous policies in terms of how they impacted North Korean defector populations in South Korea and other countries. For example, during the mid- and late-1990s, in order to improve the inter-Korean relations, the South Korean government avoided receiving North Korean defectors by rejecting those who enter South Korean embassies in foreign countries. In this unit, the focus should be on the past policies taken by the previous administrations and their consequences because current policies toward North Korea and state of the inter-Korean relations of the present is covered in Unit 4.

While this unit will mainly be a lecture on the historical events and past inter-Korean policies of South Korea, students will discuss how the Korean identity, which evidently carries a unique and significant meaning for Koreans in the diaspora, was manifested in the historical events. In addition, the students will explore why it is an important issue for both Koreas to constantly be engaged in unification talks in relation to the idea of the one-*minjok* Korea and

Korean identity. Overall, this unit will give the students the opportunity to grasp why learning about North Korea, especially within the discourse of the Korean diaspora, is essential when understanding Korea from the perspective of history.

Unit 2

North Korean Human Rights and the Stories of North Korean Defectors

An insight into North Korea after the 1990s famine and a search for the stories of North Korean defectors that are buried, silenced and unheard.

1. *Yodok Stories*. Dir. Andrzej Fidyk. 2008. Film.
2. Kim, Hye-Kyung. "Defector Rapper Won't Rest until Unification." *Korea Times*, 17 Sep. 2014. Web.

http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/culture/2015/12/143_164725.html

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand the human rights situation in North Korea, as testified by North Korean defectors.
- By looking at the examples of how North Korean activists and artists speak out their stories and experiences, students will understand the concept of agency and learn how North Koreans practice agency under oppression.

Justification of Learning Materials:

The documentary, *Yodok Stories*, follows the journey of the making of a musical, *Yodok Stories*. The musical was written and directed by a North Korean defector who was inspired by the stories of political prisoners who were incarcerated in the Yodok concentration camp in North Korea. He decided to publicize and speak about these stories as a musical and did so by interviewing several North Korean defectors who experienced the Yodok camp either as

prisoners or a guard. The documentary features the whole journey of this musical-making from experiencing difficulties with funds and recruitment of actors to successfully putting it on the stage.

Yodok Stories not only gives a sense of human rights situations in North Korea, the extreme of concentration labor camps, but also shows the lives of North Korean defectors living in South Korea. The director had to receive help from his church in order to put his show on the stage because there was no other source to fund such a non-commercial musical. Also, one of his interviewees refused to film after he found out that his family in North Korea was sent to a concentration camp for his defection. Yet, despite the challenges, the show was put on with a great (international) success, demonstrating the power of performance and art in telling stories and moving the audience to empathy and action.

Kim's article from *Korea Times* features a North Korean defector artist, Kang Chun Hyuk. Kang has been living in South Korea for 12 years as of 2014, and he is known as a defector rapper since he showed up on a popular South Korean TV show, "Show Me the Money" – a show where rappers in South Korea perform and compete. Kang, in this interview, not only shares his struggles as a North Korean defector in South Korea but most importantly introduces rapping and painting as his ways to tell his stories to others and to empower himself and other North Koreans.

Teaching Strategies:

During the class session, the teacher will show the students the website of Song Byuk (<http://www.songbyeok.com/>), a North Korean defector artist, and present some of his artworks as well as his interview video (<https://vimeo.com/33195396>) displayed on the website. This presentation of Song's interview and art will add to Kang's interview, demonstrating how North

Korean artists use arts to empower themselves by disclosing human rights violations in North Korea and sharing their struggles of the search for freedom. Students will learn the power of arts in social justice and movement, drawing examples from the stories of *Yodok Stories*, Kang Chun Hyuk, and Song Byuk. In addition, the teacher will guide the students to think about and discuss why it is so important and essential for these North Korean artists to express themselves and how such expressions by the artists might have helped North Koreans in North Korea or defectors around the world. The students will also realize the demonstration of agency by these North Koreans through learning about how they actively make themselves visible, a movement to the center of society from the margins, despite the risk involved with speaking out.

In order to further develop the discussion on agency, the teacher will show a TED talk video of Hyeonsoo Lee (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdxPCeWw75k>), a North Korean defector activist. Lee talks in this video about her and her family's journey from North Korea to South Korea, calling for the involvement of the international community in helping and supporting North Koreans to reach freedom. Her active involvement in North Korean human rights advocacy demonstrates agency and the capability of North Koreans to be their own rescuers. Students will discuss not only how important the engagement of the global community is to the North Korean human rights issues but also how North Koreans are not merely passive recipients of help from others but the leaders of this movement.

This class session which is mainly comprised of student-centered discussions allows the students to be the owners of their opinions and thoughts by offering them the opportunity to freely think and challenge their historical knowledge based on visual materials presented by the teacher. Instead of the teacher giving the students a "right" answer, in these discussions, students are able to explore the learning materials given to them on their own pace and reach their own

conclusions or realization. While the students are allowed to develop diverse understandings of the materials, the teacher should still guide and facilitate the discussions to some extent so that the learning objects are achieved.

Unit 3

Refugee or Migrant?: Resettlement of North Korean Defectors in South Korea

Are North Koreans in South Korea refugees or migrants? What strategies do they import to live in South Korea? Learning about the lives of North Korean defectors in South Korea and measures taken by the South Korean government in order to assist the resettlement of increasing incoming North Korean defectors.

1. Ministry of Unification, South Korea. "Chapter 6. Settlement Support for North Korean Refugees." *White Paper on Korean Unification*, 2014. 186-187.
2. Chung, Byung-Ho. "Between Defector and Migrant: Identities and Strategies of North Koreans in South Korea." *Korean Studies*, 32. 1-5 & 13-23.
3. Paterniti, Michael. "The Flight of the Fluttering Swallows." *New York Times Magazine*, Apr. 27, 2003. Web.

<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/04/27/magazine/27KOREA.html?pagewanted=all>

Learning Objectives:

- Students will understand different aspects of difficulties experienced by North Korean defectors in South Korea and discuss the effectiveness of the governmental measures.
- Students will understand how the challenges faced by North Korean defectors are intertwined with each other and with other issues as the inter-Korean relations and Korean reunification.

Justification of Learning Materials:

White Paper on Korean Unification 2014 gives a brief insight of the current resettlement support programs for North Korean defectors provided by the South Korean government. Students can choose to read a few subchapters following the introduction of Chapter 6 although not required, which will give them a thorough and detailed picture of resettlement assistance available to North Korean defectors. The introduction presents a simple and big image of North Korean defector populations in South Korea as well as the process of resettlement from defection to adjustment. Students will learn about various governmental resettlement support system for North Korean defectors in South Korea such as the Hanawon cultural orientation and occupational education.

Chung's article critically discusses the effectiveness of the settlement support measures from the government, drawing from his experiences working in Hanawon and closely with North Korean defectors throughout his career. He lists an array of difficulties, such as mental health problems, financial hardships, and discrimination, faced by North Korean defectors during the resettlement process, explaining why these challenges are inevitable for them. He also critiques on drawbacks and pitfalls of these resettlement assistance programs of the government and argues that these problems need to be addressed in order to truly help North Korean defectors to adjust to South Korean society. Chung's article will allow the students to critically look at the resettlement support programs from a different perspective from the one taken in *White Paper on Korean Unification*. They will also learn that struggles of North Korean defectors settling in South Korea are not one-dimensional – that they are not just a problem of money – and understand the importance of viewing the North Korean defector issue from diverse aspects, exploring the experiences of North Korean defectors and the reasons behind the challenges.

Paterniti writes about his experience with North Korean defector teenagers during the early 2000s. Before coming to South Korea, these teenagers were labelled as *kotchebi* (꽃제비) meaning fluttering swallows, a term referring to children roaming around begging for food without parents. This article reveals an insight of lives of North Korean teenagers in South Korea, including their struggles fitting in, financial hardships, difficulties handling the unbearable amount of freedom, and so on. While Chung's article will help discuss the effectiveness of governmental measures in relation to North Korean defectors' challenges with resettlement, Paterniti's article will give the students vivid and personal narratives of North Korean defector teenagers in South Korea.

Teaching Strategies:

Before starting this unit, each student will read an interview or a testimonial of a North Korean defector in South Korea (for example, the defector success stories from *DailyNK*, http://www.dailynk.com/english/sub_list.php?cataId=nk01501). At the beginning of class session, students will complete a writing exercise in which they imagine a narrative of a North Korean defector (Appendix I). After completing the exercise, the students will have the opportunity to share feelings and discuss how this exercise affected them, what they discovered or noticed about themselves doing this exercise, and so on. This exercise serves a role of not only empowering the hidden narratives of North Korean defectors but also giving the students a nudge to dig out their own buried experiences and stories. Also, the goal of this exercise is in order for the students to not only build a connection with North Korean defectors by imagining the narratives but also notice the difficulty of the act of imagining that has challenged and problematized the relationship between the center of power and the margins.

During the class session, if the teacher has experience working directly with North Korean defectors, they will share their experiences; I, for example, will give a talk about working at a North Korean human rights organization in South Korea as well as the findings and experiences interviewing North Korean defectors. For other teachers without experience working with North Korean defectors, relevant topics for the lecture include limitations of non-profit organizations as well as some governmental institutions in South Korea, indifference and lack of knowledge about North Korea and its people among South Koreans, and how the limitations of non-profit and apathetic public attitude negatively affect the experiences of the resettlement of North Korean defectors. It is important to address the issue of non-profit works in South Korea because the South Korean government depends on the help of non-governmental organizations with resettlement assistance of North Korean defectors. Yet, considering the weight of expectations set upon these organizations and the fact that many North Korean defectors seek help from them from the beginning of their defection, financial support from the government and the level of public awareness are very limited.

In a class discussion following the lecture, students will talk about their learning of different resettlement-related challenges faced by North Korean defectors in South Korea in relation to the governmental measures that support the resettlement. Drawing upon the involvement of NGOs in resettlement assistance, the students will also think about how their involvement can improve the situation for North Korean defectors on the one hand as well as how the limitations of NGOs can rather complicate the resettlement-related problems on the other. They will also critically re-consider the critiques from the Chung's article and discuss the reasons why it may be difficult for the government to make changes to the North Korean

resettlement policies because of the reasons as the involvement of interest groups in legislative procedures and the complexity of constantly-changing inter-Korean relations.

Unit 4

The Future of Two Koreas: Is Reunification a Jackpot?

What will the reunification of two Koreas bring? How does the current administration approach the issue of unification? What can we expect from the Korean reunification and what should we prepare to achieve a successful one?

1. Fuqua, Jacques L. “Deconstructing the Unification Issue.” *Korean Unification Inevitable Challenges*. Washington D.C.: Potomac Books. 2011. 3-14.
2. Sohn, JiAe. “Education Center Visualizes Reunified Korea.” *Korea.net*, 14 Nov. 2014. Web. <http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Policies/view?articleId=122910>
3. Power, John. “South Korea’s Unification School Stokes Controversy: Materials Appear Caught between Cooperation, Unification-through-absorption Themes.” *NKNews*, 17 Sep. 2015. Web. <https://www.nknews.org/2015/09/south-koreas-unification-school-stokes-controversy/>
4. In-class material: Ministry of Unification. “Korean Peninsula Trust-Building Process.” Public Advertisement. 2013. Web. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuATqCZX0K0>

Learning Objectives:

- Students will learn about the Park Geun Hye administration’s “Reunification Jackpot (통일대박, *Tongil Daebak*)” policy and the Trust-Building Process and what measures the government has taken in order to step forward with the Korean reunification.
- Students will investigate the changes of the Park administration’s approach to the reunification and discuss their opinions about how to achieve a successful unification.

Justification of Learning Materials:

“Deconstructing the Unification Issue” challenges the commonly accepted notion of the Korean reunification which is that the two Koreas need to be reunited because they were and should be one. This widely accepted image of the Korean reunification (*one-minjok* Korea) has led the people of both North Korea and South Korea to develop arguably positive attitudes toward the reunification. Yet, Fuqua argues that there are many other factors that should be considered when it comes to the future of the unified Korea. For instance, the pictures of the reunified Korea drawn by each country are very different despite the fact that both governments stress the importance of the reunification in order to strengthen the *minjok* ideology and nationalistic identity. While South Korea imagines the reunification as absorption of North Korea by South Korea – economically and politically, North Korea has different ideas. Thus, there are limitations with the assumption that there will be only positive outcomes when the two Koreas become one.

However, although Fuqua challenges the “Reunification Jackpot” viewpoint that has been pushed by the current Park administration in South Korea, he fails to go beyond the absorption-by-South-Korea scenario or to mention other possibilities of the unified future of Korea. In this scenario of South Korea absorbing North Korea economically and politically, North Koreans are automatically expected and required to assimilate into South Korean society by discarding any cultures, languages, or customs that are unique to North Korea. As the previous unit about the struggles of North Korean defectors in South Korea tells us, there are evident disadvantages of living as a North Korean defector in South Korea. If such a situation, where North Koreans struggle while South Koreans are unaware of those struggles, is perpetuated after the reunification, there will likely be an unmanageable class disparity between North and South

Koreans. It is important to note and realize that the Korean reunification has inevitable challenges due to 65 years of division almost without any communication, which can only be addressed when there is active participation from both North and South Koreans to recognize the differences, share the experiences, and understand the pasts.

The article of Sohn and Power present two different perspectives viewing the construction of the Center for Unified Korean Future (한반도 통일 미래 센터, *Hanbando Tongil Mirae Center*). Sohn articulates the goals of the educational center in the article: to “show... visitors the future of a reunified Korea” and to “enhance public awareness of the need for reunification.” On the other hand, Power critically explores the limitations of this educational venue and the controversies involved with the construction of it. One of the limitations, Power argues, is that the theme of the center focuses on the reunification through absorption by South Korea. Although it is true that such a scenario is very likely as the economy of North Korea keeps deteriorating and a number of the people starve to death in North Korea, promoting this idea of reunification-through-absorption leads South Koreans to overlook the social and cultural differences between the two Koreas, which will consequently result in a nation-wide cultural shock and conflicts when the two countries are finally unified. As Power argues, the center tries to promote the importance of the Korean reunification and appeal to the South Korean public, especially the younger generations who are often opposed to the idea, but it neglects to address the possible negative consequences of the reunification while only beautifying the unified future.

The Center for Unified Korean Future is an example that demonstrates the approach of the Park administration to North Korea and the Korean reunification. It also shows what kind of reunification education is available to the South Korean public, which allows us to roughly guess how the mindset of South Korean people would be influenced by such an education. In addition,

in the center, there is nowhere the voice of North Korean defectors living in South Korea is represented despite the significance of what their experiences may bring to the unified future of Korea. Although the intention of the South Korean government to construct such an educational center and appeal the benefits of the reunification to the public was in order to improve the inter-Korean relations and promote the importance of the Korean reunification, the limited approach that fails to recognize and admit the reality of difference between the two Koreas will not help achieve a successful reunification.

Teaching Strategies:

Depending on what policy the current South Korean administration holds toward North Korea and how the inter-Korean relations is at the time of class, this unit will carry different contents. This unit is designed to teach students on the current inter-Korean relations and where the two Koreas stand in terms of the reunification. In the beginning of this project, the South Korean government was trying to develop a trustful and peaceful relations with North Korea by implementing the Reunification Jackpot Policy as well as the Korean Peninsula Trust-Building Process. Yet, as there have been several missile tests and attacks from North Korea in recent years that target the South, in February 2016, the current president Park Geun Hye announced that the South Korean government will counter this issue by taking tough actions against North Korea. Thus, it is important to allow the students to know about such changes of policies toward North Korea and the fluctuations of the inter-Korean relations in addition to the efforts of South Korea to build trust and achieve peace within the peninsula.

The teacher will explain the details of the Reunification Jackpot Policy and the Trust-Building Process, such as the reunion of separated families (이산 가족, *Isan gajok*) and strengthening of ethnic homogeneity (민족 통합, *Minjok tonghab*), in addition to showing the

public advertisement by Ministry of Unification about the Trust-Building Process. The lecture will also cover what measures have been taken by the South Korean government in an effort to improve the inter-Korean relations under the Park administration and how these efforts were successful or unsuccessful, mentioning missile attacks and nuclear tests from the North.

Students will discuss their opinions on the current inter-Korean relations and how it may be able to improve, taking into account the realistic possible consequences of the unification addressed in the Fuqua's piece. Also, the students will learn about what kinds of tough measures are implemented against North Korea by South Korea and the international community, as decided by the UN in 2016, for its recent nuclear threats. The students will have the opportunity to share their opinions on the effectiveness of these sanctions and why they believe so. The teacher should facilitate the discussion so that the students can also learn about some side effects of these economic sanctions and hardline policies put upon North Korea. For example, some expect that the economic sanctions will only negatively affect the lives of ordinary citizens who already suffer despite their original intention to stop the North Korean government from continuing the development of nuclear plants. Again, such sanctions by the UN and their possible side effects show that the voice of people at the margins, North Korean people, is buried and hidden by the center, the North Korean government and international hegemonic powers. Concluding this unit and the course, the students learn to challenge the hegemonic and lineal way of thinking by taking the initiative to discover the buried narratives and empowering the marginalized.

Conclusion

Points to Consider and Future Discussions

As I mentioned earlier in this paper, what is discussed about North Korea here is a mere fraction of the country and thus should not be taken as a representative of the whole country. The focus of this study was exploring the narratives of people, but it is important to understand the complexity of North Korean politics, society, and culture and how all of these factors influence each other and people's lives. My summer research with North Korean defectors is also not the one and only representation of the whole North Korean defector populations in and out of South Korea, but my interviews and talks with the North Korean defectors were valuable to designing this course by offering the underlying narratives of the North Korean defector community. The Korean history as well as the politics of the Korean reunification also have much more complex dimensions to be considered such as the international power dynamics, political economy, etc. as I briefly mentioned in Unit 4 about the UN sanctions on North Korea.

Future studies on teaching North Korea and the Korean reunification to American audiences can consider these points above and expand on diverse perspectives of approaching this topic. I believe that whatever approach is taken by future studies and scholars, it will still teach students how listening to the voice of the silenced and marginalized is empowering not only for the marginalized people but also for the students themselves as a member of either another marginalized group or the mainstream.

Conclusion

Working on this project, I read a number of testimonials, interviews, and blogs written about and by North Korean defectors, and there were always many negative comments along these posts that were made by South Koreans. These South Korean commenters argue that North

Korean defectors in South Korea receive excessive assistance from the South Korean government for so little they do for the country. Some claim that South Korean men, despite the fact that all of them serve in the military for two years, are given little help from the government with unemployment problems; others say that there are many South Koreans, South Korea's own people, who struggle with poverty while the government gives more than enough money to North Korean defectors and little to these South Korean people in poverty. It is important to give a thought to implications of these hostile and aggressive comments toward North Korean defectors not only because those comments demonstrate the discrimination against North Korean defectors in South Korea but also because they show how North Korean defectors are continuously forcibly silenced and shut off from South Korean society. They also demonstrate how many South Korean people generally lack proper unification education which deconstructs the stereotypes about North Korean defectors and tells the underlying, rather than dominant, narratives of them. Thus, this teaching project is designed to bring the invisible part of the Korean diaspora – North Korea and hidden stories of its people – to the light and center of discussion by teaching it to American students whose knowledge and way of thinking have been largely influenced and constructed by the dominant mainstream culture.

In that sense, this project is not only about North Korea and the Korean American diaspora but also about oppression, agency, and identity. In the education system where the dominant culture administrates the creation, evolution, and maintenance of knowledge, students are oppressed because they are deprived of opportunities to learn about or even think about what is not taught in their schools. It is also an oppression to disregard the capacity of students to develop identities beyond a binary which has been implemented by the dominant culture in order to draw a border of terror to distinguish 'them' from 'us.'

By deconstructing what is taught and learned in this oppressive system of education, this course on North Korea helps students to engage in a different, non-mainstream, way of thinking and thus challenge the structure of dominance. In this course, students also learn to resist against hegemonic knowledge and dominant narratives, which dismiss the marginalized from society, by engaging themselves in diasporic space of Koreans and Americans in a global context and developing identities that intersect differences. Students understand not only that the marginalized and oppressed groups practice agency under the oppressive system, as demonstrated by the works of North Korean defector activists and artists who take the risk to speak out their stories, but also that they themselves practice agency by taking this non-traditional course. Ultimately, students learn to become teachers and leaders of their own communities with understanding of oppression, agency and identity and eventually take the initiatives to not only pass down their knowledge but mobilize the communities.

Appendix I

Class Schedule (Friday, April 15th 2016, 2:30PM-4:20PM)

Understanding North Korea in the Korean Diaspora:

North Korean Defectors in South Korea, the Inter-Korean Relations, and the Future of Korea

Time	Activity	Note
2:30-2:40	Imagining the Narratives	Students will imagine a narrative of a North Korean defector based on the interview article they read previously (See page 52 for prompts).
2:40-2:45	Reading	Three volunteers will share their works.
2:45-3:00	Discussion: Imagining the Narratives	What was it like to do this exercise? How did the exercise affect you? What did you discover or notice about yourself, the subject of the narrative, or the relationship/connection between you and the subject?
3:00-3:15	Instructor Lecture Part 1	North Korean defectors in South Korea (Who are North Korean defectors? What difficulties do they face in South Korea? What strategies do they import to empower themselves?)
3:15-3:35	Discussion Part 1: North Korean defectors	What do you notice about the difficulties North Korean defectors? What are the reasons behind these problems? What do you make of these videos (shown in class) of North Korean

		defector activists and artists? What are the implications of the maladjustment of North Korean defectors in terms of the future of Korea?
3:35-3:50	Instructor Lecture Part 2	From the Sunshine Policy of the previous administrations to the Trust-Building Process of the current administration (changes and development of the inter-Korean relations); the UN economic sanctions and South Korea's hardline policies toward North Korea in February 2016
3:50-4:10	Discussion Part 2: the inter-Korean relations and the Korean reunification	What were the limitations of the Park administration's approach to the reunification? Whose voice is not represented? What are the implications of the current inter-Korean relations (in relation to the Korean reunification)? What are the possible side effects of the UN sanctions? What does the future of the Korean peninsula look like?
4:10-4:20	Feedback Survey	

Imagining the Narratives Exercise Prompts

1. What past did you have before coming to South Korea and being featured as one of the success stories?
2. Do you have any family members in North Korea, China, South Korea, or anywhere else in the world?
3. What do you do for living in South Korea?
4. What is it like to live in South Korea as a North Korean defector?

Assigned Homework Materials

1. Defector Success Stories. *DailyNK*. 2015. Web.
http://www.dailynk.com/english/sub_list.php?cataId=nk01501
2. Chung, Byung-Ho. "Between Defector and Migrant: Identities and Strategies of North Koreans in South Korea." *Korean Studies*, 32. 1-5 & 13-23.
3. Sohn, JiAe. "Education Center Visualizes Reunified Korea." *Korea.net*, 14 Nov. 2014. Web. <http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Policies/view?articleId=122910>
4. Power, John. "South Korea's Unification School Stokes Controversy: Materials Appear Caught between Cooperation, Unification-through-absorption Themes." *NKNews*, 17 Sep. 2015. Web. <https://www.nknews.org/2015/09/south-koreas-unification-school-stokes-controversy/>
5. One Korea. *Institute for Unification Education*. Educational Video. 2014. Web.
<https://www.uniedu.go.kr/uniedu/home/pds/pdsatcl/view.do?mid=SM00000170&limit=20&sc=T&sv=%EC%98%81%EB%AC%B8&eqViewYn=true&page=1&id=3007&ty=MOVIE&vw=img&odr=news>

In-Class Materials (Presented by the Instructor)

1. TED. "My Escape from North Korea | Hyeonsoo Lee | TED Talks." Online video clip. *YouTube*. YouTube, 20 Mar. 2013. Web. 10 Apr. 2016. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PdxPCeWw75k>)
2. Myung-Jong Kim. "감시를 벗어나기 위한 그들의 힘겨운 여정, '판옵티콘을 넘어서' 전시회 (The Painful Journey of Those Who Struggle to Escape the Surveillance, 'Beyond the Panopticon' Exhibition)." *통일의 꿈 (Dream of Unification)*. Ministry of Unification, South Korea, 25 June 2015. Web. 10 Apr. 2016. (<http://blog.unikorea.go.kr/5181>)
3. A Unified Korea Creates New Values. *Institute for Unification Education*. Educational Video. Web. (<https://www.uniedu.go.kr/uniedu/home/cms/page/unieng/main.do?mid=UNIENG&main=true>)
4. Onyanga-Omara, Jane. "S. Korea Announces Unilateral Sanctions on Pyongyang." *USA TODAY*. March 8, 2016. Web. (<http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2016/03/08/south-korea-unilateral-sanctions/81468684/>)

Appendix II

Survey Questions

1. How did this unit broaden or challenge your previous understanding of North Korea?
2. How is learning about North Korea important to you?
3. Can you imagine learning about North Korea as in this unit in your middle, high school or college? Should it be included in the earlier education in America?
4. Is it possible for this unit to be part of your education in America? What are the obstacles, if any?
5. If you had known this in high school, how would you have been different?

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